British Waterways

British Waterways - COMMUNITY

Waterways are often at the heart of urban and rural communities, providing a focus for leisure activities and a place to get away from it all. Ten million people visit the inland waterways every year and, with half the population of the UK living within five miles of one of its canals or rivers, British Waterways has an important role to play in a community's health and wellbeing, education and events.

British Waterways is already engaged in many successful projects for improving the quality of life for people and communities close to waterways. This is achieved in partnership with a wide range of national and local organisations including Groundwork UK, The Fieldfare Trust, local authorities and charitable bodies.

British Waterways aims:

- To make sure that everyone in society has the chance to enjoy waterways that are attractive, safe and accessible
- To see the waterways used as an asset and resource by groups and organisations working to overcome the different barriers that lead to social exclusion

Further information on British Waterways initiatives to broaden the appeal of waterways to all sectors of the community can be found in *"Waterways for People"* published in May 2002 (downloadable at www.britishwaterways.co.uk).

Canal adoption schemes

The experience of the last 50 years has shown that, when they are used, canals offer idyllic refuges for everyone's benefit. When they are neglected, however, they can suffer vandalism, graffiti and hooliganism. To encourage local communities – and school children in particular – to value their local canal or river, British Waterways has developed canal adoption schemes, which promote active participation in protecting and conserving the waterways.

These schemes embrace all aspects of canal maintenance and improvement, encouraging groups to become involved in activities such as canal clean-ups, wildflower planting, repairs and enhancements, as well as visiting and studying the canal environment. There is no age limit and activities are tailored to the specific needs of individual groups. A local school in Birchills, for example, adopted a flight of locks on the Walsall Canal. Over a year, the children litter-picked the lock flight, built nest boxes, planted wildflowers and carried out 'pond-dipping', sampling the wildlife living in the canal.

Education

Over the past decade British Waterways has offered many local and regional educational initiatives such as:

- specially-devised education packs developed in conjunction with local teachers
- floating classrooms with vivid displays and canal artefacts
- pond-dipping and wildlife spotting

To build on these successful local schemes a new national education service is being developed and includes:

WOW – a new educational project to enthuse and inspire children about the inland waterways of the UK. WOW aims to introduce all children to the waterways, encouraging safe use and participation in a wide range of areas, including sport and recreation, while working in partnership with existing organisations that provide facilities and activities.

The WOW website, www.wow4water.net offers a wide range of safe children's activities, including interactive games, along with teaching aids and tailored lessons for education specialists. WOW runs exciting activities for young people at waterway events and organises its own events to involve and interest children in the environment and heritage of the waterways.

Other initiatives have included:
Best Mates - a national touring production of a specially commissioned new play about a young boy's strange and magical journey on the waterways. This innovative production, in partnership with the Royal National Theatre, was presented in atmospheric warehouses alongside canals and met with wide critical acclaim.

The Waterways Challenge – a range of exciting "hands-on" activities for schools, youth groups and families, challenging groups to investigate and discover many amazing things to be found around our waterways.

Toons by kids - Children work with professional animators to create enchanting animation that bring canal stories to life for a new generation.

Safety
Child safety near canals is a very important issue for British Waterways and one of the key messages communicated by WOW is **S.A.F.E**. – **S**tay **A**way **F**rom the **E**dge. This is a cornerstone of events, www.wow4water.net and of the bright, lively informative literature produced by the WOW team. Children are reminded of the hidden dangers of canals, including locks and weirs, submerged objects and ice. Children are advised always to visit waterways with an adult and our safety information seeks to improve their understanding of the waterways and its environment so that they may become the responsible waterway users of tomorrow.

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For almost a decade British Waterways has supported the popular children's TV puppet characters, Rosie and Jim, to help reinforce the safety message to 4–7 year olds.

Events

The waterways offer stunning and unique backdrops for local, regional and national events. As well as participating in a variety of festivals, British Waterways has led the way in co-ordinating and running 'On Water' themed events, offering live art and entertainment activity for traditional waterway enthusiasts and the general public. British Waterways hosts the annual Crick Boat Show on the Leicester Line of the Grand Union Canal and sponsors the National Waterways Festival. British Waterways also takes part in the Europe-wide scheme, 'Heritage Open Days', which aims to stimulate public awareness in the built environment by allowing free access to historic buildings.

Access for All

Designed with a horse rather than a buggy or a wheelchair in mind, towpaths are not always the easiest places to reach or travel along. However, towpaths are often wide and not very steep, so can be ideal places for people to exercise or for easy contact with the environment. British Waterways is working to make the waterways more accessible for people with a disability through a national agreement with disability charity, The Fieldfare Trust on access standards. This "Access for All" standard is used to assess all new developments.

Partnership

British Waterways cares for more than 2,000 miles of canals and rivers nationwide. This is a resource that can be used by many charitable, voluntary and community based organisations. Concentrating solely on our waterways as a place for recreation would be to under value this unique national asset. Working in partnership, British Waterways can contribute much more. In some cases British Waterways fund organisations who wish to use the waterways for their own work, elsewhere we take a more active role, running projects that link with local schools, health organisations and voluntary, community and charitable groups.

Involvement

Communities care about how their local waterway changes – about any development that takes place and about how the waterway is managed. British Waterways is committed to involving local people in the planning and management of our canals and rivers.

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